



NEWS RELEASE

Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

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Illinois EPA Announces Virtual Environmental Education Opportunities

Poster, Poetry, and Prose Contest and Dive In! Educational Resources Available Online for Elementary and Middle School Students

SPRINGFIELD – In an effort to accommodate the various learning environments of Illinois students, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today announced new resources available to Illinois teachers and students. Due to the ongoing pandemic, Illinois EPA has revised existing environmental education programs to be used virtually for in-classroom and remote learning.

The Illinois EPA invites 5th and 6th grade student writers and artists to compete in this school year's Poster, Poetry, and Prose Contest with the theme "*Fight Food Waste: Our Environment Can't Be Replaced!*" The theme focuses on understanding how food waste diversion options affects the environment, including climate change, and why it is important to choose environmentally friendly options.

Educators, parents and caregivers are asked to introduce these topics using the Illinois EPA's free, online curriculum titled *Environmental Pathways: Where does my food go?* The unit was developed by the Office for Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education (MSTE) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and is aligned with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Following the unit, students are asked to create posters or written works related to the theme's focus. Entries must be submitted to the Illinois EPA by February 1, 2021. For additional information, visit:

<https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/education/contest/Pages/default.aspx>.

"Educators and students have faced numerous challenges as they have adapted to hybrid and remote learning," said Illinois EPA Director John Kim. "It is our hope that these virtual opportunities will allow students to continue growing their knowledge of the environment and the importance of protecting it."

In addition to the annual contest, the Illinois EPA is also announcing that *Dive In! 2020* has been restructured as a virtual event with pre-recorded presentations. *Dive In!* is an annual Illinois EPA-sponsored event that typically travels throughout Illinois each fall to teach students about the importance of protecting and conserving our precious natural resources. *Dive In! 2020* presentations are available on the Illinois EPA's website at:

<https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/education/Pages/Presentations.aspx>.

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These “Tools for Teachers” are available for free to all educators, parents, and caregivers at their convenience when implementing corresponding topics into the student’s daily learning activities. *Dive In!* environmental education presentations include: The Groundwater Lesson, Benthic Freshwater Macroinvertebrates, The Big Impact of Small Changes (Recycling), Introduction of Rocks and Minerals, and a list of free resource links offered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Division of Education. Most presentations are developed from Illinois EPA staff and are geared towards elementary to middle school-aged students.

The Illinois EPA also offers several other environmental education presentations on the Earth Stewardship Day website at: <https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/education/earth-stewardship-day/Pages/photos.aspx>, which includes topics such as Illinois Ecosystems, honeybees, butterflies, watersheds, mussels, and storytelling and are geared towards elementary-aged students. The recorded presentations also include closed captioning.

Information about all of Illinois EPA’s environmental education programs can be found at: <https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/education/Pages/default.aspx>, or by contacting Kristi Morris, Environmental Education Coordinator for the Illinois EPA by email at Kristi.Morris@illinois.gov. Current and past Environmental Pathways curriculum can be found at: <https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/education/Pages/pathways.aspx>.

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